



**STATEMENT OF PROCEEDINGS FOR THE
REGULAR MEETING OF THE
LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
KENNETH HAHN HALL OF ADMINISTRATION
500 WEST TEMPLE STREET, ROOM 739
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90012
<http://lachildrenscommission.org>**

Monday, September 16, 2013

10:00 AM

AUDIO LINK FOR THE ENTIRE MEETING. (13-4392)

Attachments: [AUDIO](#)

Present: Chair Genevra Berger, Vice Chair Helen Kleinberg, Vice Chair Susan F. Friedman, Commissioner Carol O. Biondi, Commissioner Candace Cooper, Commissioner Patricia Curry, Commissioner Ann E. Franzen, Commissioner Sydney Kamlager, Commissioner Becky A. Shevlin, Commissioner Adelina Sorkin LCSW/ACSW and Commissioner Steven M. Olivas Esq.

Excused: Commissioner Dr. Sunny Kang, Commissioner Daphne Ng and Commissioner Martha Trevino-Powell

Call to Order. (13-4307)

The meeting was called to order at 10:05 a.m. A quorum was established at 10:15 a.m.

I. ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

1. Introductions of September 16, 2013 Meeting attendees. (13-4166)

Self-introductions were made.

Agenda Items 2 and 3 were taken after Agenda Item 6.

2. Approval of the September 16, 2013 Meeting Agenda. (13-4173)

On motion of Vice Chair Helen Kleinberg, seconded by Commissioner Becky Shevlin, (Commissioners Kang, Ng, and Trevino-Powell being absent), this item was approved.

3. Approval of the minutes from the meeting of August 19, 2013. (13-4169)

On motion of Vice Chair Susan Friedman, seconded by Vice Chair Helen Kleinberg, (Commissioners Kang, Ng, and Trevino-Powell being absent), this item was approved.

Attachments: [SUPPORTING DOCUMENT](#)

II. REPORT

- 4.** Chair's report for September 16, 2013 by Genevra Berger, Chair. (13-4175)

Chair Berger reported the following:

- **The Commission was invited to present at the Chief Executive Office (CEO) Children and Family Well-Being Cluster Meeting.**
- **The Commission's election for Chair and Vice Chair will be held on October 21, 2013.**

After discussion, by common consent and there being no objection, this item was received and filed.

III. PRESENTATIONS

- 5.** Update by the Alliance for Children's Rights on the Continuum of Care Reform.
- **Angie Schwartz, Esq., Policy Director (13-4304)**

Ms. Schwartz referred to the presentation material that was distributed, titled "The Story of Two Foster Children" and reported the following:

- **The existing Continuum of Care inequities between foster children placed with relatives versus those placed with non-relatives are at the root of many of the issues the Continuum of Care Reform (CCR) is seeking to solve.**
- **In Los Angeles County, one of the biggest problems the Department of Children and Families (DCFS) is faced with is a shortage of foster homes. The unfair and unequal treatment of foster families is central to this shortage. Addressing these inequities will help to create additional homes for foster youth in homes of relatives.**
- **The major disparity is in the level of support a foster child receives based on federal foster care eligibility criteria. A federally eligible foster child receives \$820 a month. In Los Angeles County,**

approximately 60% of foster youth are not federally eligible because they are placed with a relative. Those who are not federally eligible may apply for CalWORKs which provides \$351, an amount less than half of the federal foster care support. This disproportionality is not attributed to the needs of a federally eligible foster youth being different but, because of where they are placed and demonstrates that two foster care systems exist in Los Angeles and across California. The vast inequities between these two systems are standing in the way of Reform.

- CCR efforts underway include the goal of reducing the time youth spend in group and intensive treatment foster homes to ensure that all children live with a committed, permanent and nurturing family. In Los Angeles County, the goal is to increase the number of these family placements. Both goals are in line with federal and state legislative requirements, which is to ensure placement with relatives whenever possible. We look to our relatives because we know that children placed with relatives have fewer negative experiences in foster care than non-relative placements. Relatives are also more likely to take in siblings and to maintain the child's connection with their families.
- Children in foster care deserve to have the basic support necessary to meet their daily needs and if possible enough to provide for extracurricular classes or activities that can be highly beneficial in providing foster youth an outlet and involvement in their communities. However, the reality is that a relative caregiver receives a fraction of the support that a child placed with a non-relative receives. Relative foster parents are often in need of the most support, 40% of relative foster parents live below the federal poverty line.
- Although the Child Welfare system's preferred placement of foster youth is with relatives, the decision to deny foster care benefits to relative caregivers has ramifications in the recruitment of relatives, the stability of homes, and the outcomes for foster youth. Additionally, the decision to provide relatives less funding is not because relative foster parents are expected to provide a different level of care from other foster parents. Relative foster parents in California are approved by the same standards as non-relative foster parents and expected to provide the same support, nurturance and guidance.
- This inequity exists because of State policy enacted many decades ago which requires a foster child to be federally eligible in order to receive State foster care benefits. Relative foster parents in California are never eligible for State foster care funding. In order for a foster child placed with a relative to be federally eligible, the child must have been

removed from a household that was below the federal poverty level that existed in 1996. These rules used to qualify a child for federal foster care continue to be based on the laws of 1996 and the amounts used to determine eligibility have never been adjusted for inflation. None of the criteria of this rule is based on the needs of the child or the caregiver where the child is placed. Los Angeles County has reinforced this policy, despite the fact that the federal Title IV-E Waiver (Waiver) allows the County to change this inequitable practice without waiting for the State to take action. There are 60% of foster children in Los Angeles County that are ineligible for federal foster care and 56% in the State.

- Children placed with relatives only receive CalWORKs. The disparity of support for siblings is even greater. While Federal foster care is doubled for an additional child, reaching \$1640 in support, CalWORKs only increases to \$577, which is less than the amount of support that a non-relative receives to care for one child. This disparity is even more extreme with a child having developmental disabilities. While a non-relative receives upwards of \$3,000 through federal foster care a month to provide for special needs, a relative caregiver's CalWORKs support remains the same.
- Denying adequate funding to relative caregivers sets them up for failure. When a relative can no longer provide for a youth, particularly those with special needs, they often end up being placed in a Group Home. A youth placed in a Group Home costs \$102,000 per year, a relative is expected to provide for that same youth on \$4,200 per year. Group Homes are a much higher cost on the State and County.
- The point of a Waiver is to have the flexibility to waive the outdated rules that are standing in the way of better supporting families. If the goal is to do a better job of recruiting, supporting and training foster parents, there should be one system where the policies and rules are aligned with the values and goals. The plight of foster youth is not different from the plight of caregivers. In order to improve outcomes for children in foster care, the families they are living with must have the resources necessary to help these children thrive. There is an opportunity to change this inequity through the Continuum of Care Reform. The County can and should lead the way and pave the path for equal treatment of our relative foster parents.

Tiffany Soto shared her experience as a relative foster parent to her nephew, Elijah, now her adopted son who was two years old at the time he was placed in her care with the following:

- **The process to become a foster parent is the same for relatives and non-relatives. There is a tremendous amount of rules that a foster parent must comply with. Since Elijah was a relative, federal funding was not an option. The only support received was available through CalWORKs at an amount not nearly enough to support a child and even more difficult to provide support for a child who had experienced trauma. The cost of school alone far exceeded the \$351 CalWORKs provides.**
- **The process of qualifying required a considerable amount of time off from work. Information provided by the Welfare worker indicated that if the required documentation was received by a certain date, CalWORKs would start not too long after and back pay would be allotted. Documents were submitted at the end of 2011, CalWORKs was not received until February, 2012 with no back payments. After voicing concerns with a DCFS worker, the response received was that it was unfortunate that my family was part of the system. Ultimately, DCFS perception was that we were part of the problem. The decision to become a relative foster parent had a tremendous impact on my family life.**
- **Relative caregivers are held to the same standards, same approval processes as non-relative caregivers. However, there is the extra strife of having turmoil within the family due to the circumstances involved. Relative caregivers need the same support as non-relatives.**

The presenters responded to questions posed by the Commission with the following:

Ms. Soto responded:

- **Avoiding going the qualification process required by the child welfare system was not an option because Elijah was already in the system having been removed from his mother's care. The Dependence Court is in charge of the child and has several requirements the foster parent must follow. For instance, supervised parental visitation was mandated which, meant that the parents who were convicted of felony child abuse were allowed visitation. Many of these mandates conflicted with what was in Elijah's best interest. If there was non-compliance, the**

Social Worker threatened that Elijah would be placed in foster care. The adoption was finalized in March of 2013.

- **It was an awful experience dealing with the DCFS system. The treatment lacked compassion and any individualized treatment. It appeared that the system was concerned more with protecting the parent's rights rather than the child's well-being. It took some time for DCFS to acknowledge the criminal aspect of the case until the Police Department was involved. The perceived sentiment was that the DCFS Workers passed judgment on families in the system. There were individuals who were very helpful for instance; the Adoption Worker was very helpful.**
- **In terms, of special services being provided for Elijah, the Court ordered therapy that was received through the Children's Institute Inc. for two years.**

Ms. Schwartz responded:

- **In Los Angeles County the Waiver is an obvious solution to balancing the inequitable support of foster children. CCR discussed the possibility of relative foster parents being licensed and receiving the same benefits that Foster Family Agencies (FFA) receive. Another solution may be to increase the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Grant and CalWORKs amount.**
- **The Title IV-E Waiver five year evaluation by Dr. Charles Ferguson that was released this year indicated that Los Angeles County spent \$55 million of the Waiver with 6% of this amount having been spent directly on children. There is an opportunity to make more of an investment on family placement in the next five year waiver. Dr. Ferguson's breakdown on funding spent is 49% internally on staff, 45% externally on contracts including services for children and families, and 6% directly on children.**
- **State legislation that provides support for relative caregivers is anticipated in the next couple of years.**
- **Relative caregivers are faced with many issues involved with the home approval standards mandated by the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA). There is an effort at the national level to address some of these issues.**

The Commission requested data from DCFS on the number of children in the system that are forced to leave relative care due to inadequate support.

Fesia Davenport, Chief Deputy Director, DCFS thanked Ms. Soto for sharing her experience and explained the following:

- It is not certain if foster youth replacements are tracked to the level that specifies whether the child was replaced due to a relative caregiver's inability to monetarily support the child.
- Foster parent recruitment issues are an ongoing theme within DCFS. Feedback has been received from surveys sent to approximately 400 current and former foster parents on the challenges of being a foster parent. Additionally, Family and Kinship providers have been asked to provide feedback on obstacles they are faced with. One of the main issues identified is the lack of support available for younger children. DCFS has been looking at ways to address these issues and are working with the State and Casey Foundation.

After discussion, by common consent and there being no objection, this item was received and filed.

Attachments: [SUPPORTING DOCUMENT](#)

6. Update by the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) on the Strategic Planning Process.

- Fesia Davenport, Chief Deputy Director (13-3425)

Ms. Davenport distributed a document titled, "Budget Priorities and Strategic Plan - Department of Children and Families", and explained that the following update is not inclusive of all Strategic Objectives and is broken down into three primary categories: safety; permanency and well-being:

- The Blue Ribbon Commission on Child Protection (BRC) requested that DCFS identify barriers of child safety and permanency the Department is faced with. The plan is for the response to BRC to indicate prioritization of the barriers for a clearer understanding.

Fundamental Practice Changes:

- The Title IV-E Waiver (Waiver) ended its five year term on June 30, 2012. The Department was able to negotiate two bridge years, and is currently in the second bridge year ending in 2014. There are approximately 18 other counties that have expressed an interest in becoming a Waiver county. The State has developed a template for planning the next five years. The Department is currently working with Casey Foundation on potential strategies for the next five year Waiver. Director Browning has requested that the County be present in the upcoming State and Federal negotiations. It is not certain whether this is possible.
- This Core Practice Model (CPM) has been implemented in four offices. There are many in the department that do not support the move to CPM and stand behind the law enforcement approach. Moving to CPM requires cultural change. New staff is being assigned a mentor on their first day on the job. Countywide targeted implementation is December 2014.
- The DCFS Policy Manual (Manual) rewrite is underway. An outside vendor is assisting with separating policy from procedure. Currently, processes and procedures are combined. Approximately 300 policies have been consolidated down to about 250 policies. Elements of the Core Practice Model are being integrated into the Manual. A web-based format of the Manual is scheduled to be operational in January 2014. The Union has been invited to participate in a Workgroup focusing on the Manual rewrite. The web-based format will include features that make searching for policies easy. The web application is being funded through a Quality and Productivity Commission Grant. A survey conducted with 150 Social Workers, testing the web based appearance resulted with positive feedback. Some Strategic Plan Objective Teams have recommended substantial changes to some of the policies. In terms of removing certain policies, it is very difficult to determine whether a policy is still necessary. The decision to remove a policy must be without consequence. It must be proven that the policy has not prevented a child's death.

Safety:

- The redesigned Children's Social Worker (CSW) Training curriculum for new and existing workers is fifty-two weeks; training previously lasted eight weeks. The restructured curriculum includes a "real life" simulation component. The redesigned training started at the

beginning of August 2013. Feedback has been very positive on the simulation. Managers will also be sent to the “real life” simulation training.

- A consultant conducted an assessment of existing business processes and provided a series of recommendations primarily dealing with practices to Director Browning and the Executive Team.
- The Case Load Equity Model (Model) will be used to determine where new incoming staff will be placed. The Model is a mathematical formula based on a number of variables to assist in determining the level of case complexity and location based staffing needs. The Analysis was shared with Union and was supported.

Permanency:

- To assist in finding suitable placement for children in emergency situations, DCFS has implemented a Memorandum of Understanding with the Probation Department to run California Law Enforcement Telecommunications System (CLETS) clearances that are required before placing a child with a relative or family friend. This reduces the background check time from approximately 4 hours to 15 minutes.
- A Child Welcome Center for children ages zero to 12 was established.
- The Strategic Objective Team focusing on adoptions has mapped out the current process and identified areas where efficiencies can be gained.
- The number of children placed in Out-of-Home Care has decreased from 20,047 in 2007 to 16,613 in 2013. The average number of days in placement has decreased from 1,209 in 2007 to 784 in 2013.
- The total number of children in Group Homes decreased from 1,305 in 2007 to 951 in 2013. The number of children 12 years old and under decreased from 248 in 2007 to 106 in 2013. Director Browning implemented a set of protocols for placing young children in Group Homes. The State is looking towards establishing similar protocols.
- The Strategic Objective Team focusing on reducing racial disparity are combining efforts with Juvenile Court Presiding Judge Michael Nash’s racial disparity workgroup.

Commissioner Curry suggested that there be a Commission representative on Judge Nash's Workgroup.

- Enhancements have been made to the foster care search engine. FFA's are able to go into the system and update the system with their vacancy information.

Commissioner Sorkin shared that the Strategic Plan Objective team she participates on indicated that there is a large amount of children in care for more than 3 years that are under age 5.

Well Being:

- Implement a countywide self-sufficiency plan for TAY. In August of 2013, the Chief Executive Officer provided a report to the Board of Supervisors on the status of the January 2013 motion (Board Order No. 6 of January 5, 2013) that asked for Management Appraisal Performance Plan (MAPP) goals from the affected Departments to include transitional aged youth outcomes. This included the Departments of Mental Health (DMH), Public Health (DPSS), Public Social Services (DPSS), Health Services (DHS), Community and Senior Services (CSS), and Office of Education (LACOE).
- The Strategic Objective Team focusing on reducing the number of Cross Over Youth will be providing a more detailed status report that should be reflected in the next Strategic Plan Update.
- To strengthen the DCFS Workforce, the Department is working towards enhancing its Return to Work Program.
- Technology efforts include the roll out of 2,400 tablets. Positive feedback has been received from staff on the roll out of the iPhones.

In response to questions posed by the Commission, Ms. Davenport explained the following:

- The "real life" simulation training can be altered to meet specific training needs or situations. The immediate objective is to get the newly hired people trained. Once, new staff has been trained, a needs assessment will be conducted to tailor the simulated training to best meet the Department's needs.

After discussion, by common consent and there being no objection, this item was received and filed.

Attachments: [SUPPORTING DOCUMENT](#)

IV. MISCELLANEOUS

Matters Not Posted

7. Matters not posted on the agenda, to be discussed and (if requested) placed on the agenda for action at a future meeting of the Commission, or matters requiring immediate action because of an emergency situation or where the need to take action arose subsequent to the posting of the agenda. (13-4300)

There were none.

Announcements

8. Announcements for the meeting of September 16, 2013. (13-4301)

There were none.

Public Comment

9. Opportunity for members of the public to address the Commission on items of interest that are within the jurisdiction of the Commission. (13-4179)

No members of the public addressed the Commission.

Adjournment

10. Adjournment of the meeting of September 16, 2013. (13-4303)

The meeting was adjourned at 12:10 p.m.